



**30 years
& counting**

**School Practitioner
Listserv**

**A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange**



April 11, 2016

Concern from a Principal:

>Effective strategies to address barriers to learning

- Center Response
- Comments from the Field

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Views about Upcoming Proms

>Superintendent on: "What I love, and hate, about proms"

>A Student's perspective on proms

Featured Set of Center Resources:

>About Safe, End-of-the-year Celebrations

#####

**Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested.
The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.**

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of
the weekly exchange, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

**For previous recent postings of this community of practice, see
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

#####

Note: In keeping with the *National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports*,* this community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed. The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.

Concern from the Field:

“I am the principal of a K-5 Elementary School. Our school serves 758 students with 100% free and reduced population. Over the past few years we have noticed that some of the challenges we face with our students seem overwhelming and we often feel ineffective. Our constant focus on academic content, strategies, programs, and interventions leaves us feeling confident to deliver instruction, we just can't always get to it as we are addressing behavior on a consistent basis. I began to read, study, and immerse myself in anything and everything related to trauma, behavior, development, and learning. With very little understanding and/or depth of knowledge in this area, one thing I know for sure is that we (public school systems) must address the barriers that students bring each day to learning. There is a lot of information regarding trauma, adverse conditions, and their impact on learning., For me, it is very overwhelming. There is minimal attention to this issue in our state, even less in my school district, thus leaving me feeling a little alone and desperately seeking support and advice. Our school has a core group of teachers that recognize that we must be open to and learn about our students barriers to learning, but we were not sure where to go next.

I like your framework and would appreciate any support and coaching you could give. My first question/thought is this: I have noticed through this process that many of our teachers, both experienced and new, do not have a mental model for behavior and learning. They respond to behavior in the way that they experienced and learned about school. Often, their reaction to behavior and to children that express challenges consistently shows frustration, anger, and personal disconnect. This has created an acute sense for me that notices both subtle and overt actions that I believe re-traumatize children everyday. I believe our teachers are suffering from both mental models that do not align with our reality and cost of care burn-out. I believe work with every adult at our school needs to happen alongside our learning about learning barriers. Can you help me with this?”

Center Response: **First, let us share a perspective on one of the many complexities schools face in responding to misbehavior – that of balancing the school’s roles in socializing as contrasted with helping students, especially when these two roles conflict with each other.**

Here is an excerpt from the Center resource entitled: *Helping and socialization* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/helping.pdf>

“The problem of conflicting agenda is particularly acute for those who work in ‘institutional’ settings such as schools. In such settings, the tasks confronting the intervener often include (a) helping individuals overcome underlying problems and (b) controlling misbehavior to maintain social order. At times the two are incompatible. And, although all interventions in the setting may be designated as ‘remediation’ or ‘treatment,’ the need for social control can overshadow the concern for helping. Moreover, the need to control individuals in such settings has led to coercive and repressive actions. Ultimately, every intervener must personally come to grips with what s/he views as morally proper in balancing the respective rights of the various parties when interests conflict.”

It is evident that teachers need to focus on socialization (e.g., teaching social behaviors needed to benefit the student, the class, and the society). At the same time, it should be obvious that some student misbehavior requires providing help that addresses underlying problems. And it is important to remember that socializing strategies often produce psychological reactance that exacerbates such problems. For such students, schools need a safety net of learning supports (people, programs) to address their problems in ways that engage and re-engage these youngsters in classroom instruction.

In many schools, especially elementary schools, there may only be a few out-of-class resources for pursuing a helping agenda. So teachers, who are sensitive to individual student problems must add helping to their socializing efforts. They can use a range of accommodations and forms of special assistance to enhance the success of students who are facing challenges. To provide more time for helping, they can create a classroom setting that increases small group and individual support through use of classroom volunteers and independent and cooperative learning activities and projects.

Below are a few of our online clearinghouse Quick Finds that link to resources that can aid the continuing education of all school staff as one facet of capacity building to enhance the school's role in helping and not just socializing students who manifest behavior problems:

- >Classroom climate – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm>
- >Classroom based learning supports – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm>
- >Volunteers in schools – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/volunteers.html>

Now, with respect to our frameworks for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students:

We know transforming systems is difficult, and we endeavor to be helpful to schools everywhere as they try to move forward with the development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. We have made that agenda the central concern of the *National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html> .

With this in mind, we offer distance coaching and develop a variety of materials and compile many introductory materials and resource aids in the Center's *System Change Toolkit for Transforming Student Supports* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/resourceaids.htm>

In the toolkit, for example, see the following resource designed to guide principals who have decided to move forward:

- >*Establishing a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports at a School: Seven Steps for Principals and Their Staff* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/7steps.pdf>

We also develop documents designed to help teachers and other school staff rethink some of what they are doing to better address students' learning, behavior, and/or emotional problem. For example, see:

- >*Learning Supports: Enabling Learning in the Classroom* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtipract.pdf>

and the continuing education self-study and formal inservice modules – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/materials/trainingpresentation.htm#ce>

Comments from the Field: We shared the principal's concerns with several colleagues, and here is a sample of responses.

- (1) "It seems these concerns are becoming more and more frequent, if not fairly common, at least that's been my experience in working with schools. I wish there was a simple solution, but every school's culture and needs are different, so there's no 'one size fits all' solution. It really takes time to develop a realistic plan, get buy-in from the staff, make the commitment, then roll up the sleeves and start the really work hard to make this happen. It also takes a shift in thinking because it won't work until we recognize that continuing to do things the way we've always done them just isn't working. Even if a school does all of these things, they still need guidance and resources — someone with knowledge and experience (perhaps with action research) to get them on track. It sounds like this school leader is ready to do what is needed — and that's the first step. There's a need to offer consultation and coaching for these schools/districts. There is such a huge need and very little help available."

(2) “The principal stated they have a ‘core group of teachers’ who seem to want change and understand so I would start there and determine the challenges (what and why they are feeling overwhelmed and ineffective). Behavior is also closely tied to academic instruction ... meaning if the students are engaged academically then maladaptive behavior is reduced so I would suggest a litmus test of delivered instruction and school climate and culture. I would suggest this principal look at frameworks for learning supports. This situation sounds like it requires direct work with this school/district.”

Invitation to listserv participants: *What’s your take on all this?* What have you found helpful in providing learning supports in classrooms so that teachers can provide a better teaching match for the range of students they have? Looking forward to hearing from you. Ltaylor@ucla.edu

#####

Perspective on Upcoming Proms

>A Superintendent’s Reflections: “What I love, and hate, about proms”

In a guest column for the *Carolina Gateway*,

<http://www.carolinagatewayonline.com/content/moore-column-what-i-love-and-hate-about-proms>

Dr. Gene Moore, superintendent of Lancaster County School District, wrote the following.

I loved some things about prom when I was a principal early in my career.

I loved seeing how hard juniors and their teacher sponsors worked to transform a plain banquet hall into a magical, glittering place.

I loved watching the limos pull up, full of students so excited about a night they’d been looking forward to for years.

I loved seeing the boys decked out in their tuxes and the girls in fairy-tale gowns.

And I loved the idea that this one night would be magic for students I’d watched grow and mature into young men and women.

But I hated what I knew might spoil that night.

I hated knowing that too often one or two students might use what was supposed to be a night of magic as an excuse to drink.

I dreaded playing “catch the drinkers,” the lies the students would tell to cover up, the calls to their parents, their anger and shame.

I hated the suspensions or expulsions that followed — sometimes costing the students scholarships, costing them their places on teams they’d been part of for years, costing them memberships in Beta Club or National Honor Society or service clubs.

But worst of all, I hated the fear I always felt, the fear that some of our students would be injured or would kill themselves or someone else in an accident on prom night, an accident caused by alcohol.

The statistics around teen drinking and driving always fed that fear.

- The fact that one-third of the fatal traffic accidents involving teens each year occur during prom months — April, May and June.

- The fact that nearly 700 students under the age of 21 are killed in alcohol-related traffic crashes each year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

- The fact that the alcohol-use rate for Lancaster County youth exceeds the national average, according to a survey by the Coalition for Healthy Youth.

Our schools make a tremendous effort to stop students from drinking on prom night. And business and community agencies are making that effort, too.

We hold Prom Promise, trying to get students to pledge not to drink on prom night.

We hold class meetings to discuss the dangers and consequences students will face for drinking on prom night.

We get students to write and make videos and do projects on the dangers of underage drinking. But the truth is, probably the most effective way to get students not to drink is for parents to simply talk with their teens about the dangers of drinking on prom night.

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention has done research showing that even though parents don't believe it, their children listen to them, that when parents speak frankly and sincerely about the dangers of drinking on prom night, their children don't drink.

There are other things parents can do to stop teen drinking on prom night, too.

Here are some tips I found online.

- Make sure your teen has a plan for the evening and make sure you know what that plan is.
- Take an inventory of the alcohol in your home and secure it if needed.
- Know who's driving your child to the prom. If it's a rented limo, check their policy on allowing alcohol in the vehicle.
- Go over the school's prom rules with your child, especially the consequences for violating them.
- Tell your child over and over and over to use that seatbelt — too often students don't want to ““wrinkle up their clothes.”
- Communicate with other parents and school staff.
- Stay up for your child's return home and let them know you'll be waiting up.

Together, let's all — students, parents, teachers and the community — work together to make this year's prom a magic one.”

>A Student's Perspective on Proms.

As part of the network of advisors to our Center, we have a group of college students who share their perspectives and reflections on their experiences in school. Here is one student's reflections on alternatives to the prom.

In my own experience, I remember one of my teachers speaking in class about two weeks before prom and trying to give us some perspective on the event. She wanted us to have a good time, but also acknowledged the enormous stress that it caused for some people. My teacher encouraged us to view it as just another dance and to focus on graduating instead. She had chaperoned so many proms over the years and shared with us some of the very negative things she saw happen when students weren't using their best judgment. While trying to downplay the event may seem like being a killjoy to some, many of my friends and I found it reassuring to hear from an adult that life indeed does go on past these high school celebrations because most students were very much caught up in a prom and end-of-the-year craze. I think teachers and/or counselors should engage students in conversations like these months before prom to temper the frenzy that can accompany the event and possibly prevent the unwise decisions students make at prom and post-prom parties. It is of course perfectly acceptable to be happy and excited about prom, but I think there is much potential for danger when students blow it into epic proportions. Another thing that my high school did, which looking back I now view as a wise decision, was to not have a prom queen or king. The end of the year was just too filled with other anxiety-inducing events to have so much stress and energy expended on that. We simply had a homecoming king and queen in the fall, and I think that greatly reduced the tension around prom time.

#####

Featured Set of Center Resources

>About Safe, End-of-the-year Celebrations

The end of the school year is a favorite time for everyone. For most students, it is a time to be congratulated and to celebrate. For some, it is a temporary reprieve from problems experienced at school. This is the time to help everyone find hope for the future and experience a sense that they have accomplished something worthwhile. And it is a time to help them celebrate in ways that minimize tragedy. The key to focusing on hope and accomplishment is to identify whatever a student has done positively, clarify how the student can build on this in coming years, and convey all this personally to the student and family. Drawing on what we know about personal motivation, the focus needs to be on specifics that can enhance feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness to significant others; minimize messages that threaten such feelings.

With respect to end of the year celebrations, each is something to cherish, and the anticipation of each represents a natural opportunity to promote social and emotional learning (e.g., enhanced understanding of self and others, increased sense of responsibility for self and others, expanded social problem solving skills).

Of special concern are teen parties and proms. The need is to provide guidance and support and to do much more to minimize negative side effects.

“More than one-third of youth under the age of 21 killed in alcohol related fatalities died during the months prior to graduation season, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. ..1,012 died during the months of April, May and June.”
<http://alcoholism.about.com/cs/teens/a/blcc030514.htm>

Looking for ideas about safe, end of year celebrations? Search the internet for the many sites on
>*end-of-the school year celebrations* >*safe proms* >*prom alternatives* >etc.
Note: We don't have a Quick Find directly related to end of year celebrations. So if you have any online resources we can compile into an online clearinghouse Quick Find, please send them to Ltaylor@ucla.edu.

Of course, it is important to remember good decision making is learned, as is concern and caring for others. So from that perspective, safe exuberance reflects how well the school has done in promoting intrinsically motivated responsibility and social-emotional development. For resources related to these topics, see the Center's *online clearinghouse Quick Finds on*

- >*Social and Emotional Development* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm
- >*Motivation, Engagement, Re-engagement* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

*For information about the
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports, see
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!

Send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences to ltaylor@ucla.edu
We post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange*
on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm>
and to *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)